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PROGRAM Nightline

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SUBJECT Full Text

TED KOPPEL: A spy for the CIA in Moscow. Was his cover inadvertently blown here in Washington? And why did some details of the case leak out?

Tonight we'll examine the story of Anatoliy Filatov and what it tell us about the art of disinformation. We'll talk live with a journalist expert on espionage and with a former Czech agent who was assigned to give false intelligence to the West.

And on Day 319 of the crisis in Iran, the U. S. confirms it will cooperate in an investigation of Iran's complaints if that will speed the hostages' release.

ANNOUNCER: This is ABC News Nightline. Reporting from Washington, Ted Koppel.

KOPPEL: Good evening.

We want to focus tonight on a spy story. What needs to be said at the outset is that stories of this kind in real life do not easily lend themselves to a sharp focus. Too many people have a vested interest in highlighting parts of the story selectively, in blurring other parts, and, with some aspects, deliberately deceiving. There are national interests to be protected and political axes to be ground.

But, first, here's diplomatic correspondent Barrie Dunsmore with a look at the man who was once at the center of this story.

BARRIE DUNSMORE: Name: Anatoliy Filatov. Code name:

Tregon. Location: Political/Military Bureau, Soviet Foreign Ministry, Moscow. Intelligence rating: one of the most valuable operatives on the U. S. payroll.

In the early '70s, Anatoliy Filatov was a minor Soviet diplomat in Algeria. According to the Soviet news agency Tass, foreign intelligence agencies took advantage of his striving for a liaison and deliberately arranged an acquaintance for him with a loose woman. Evidently, Filatov was photographed in a compromising situation and then blackmailed.

By the mid '70s, Filatov returned to Moscow. He began working in a well connected position in the Foreign Ministry and filing reports with the CIA. According to a Washington intelligence source, his importance was very hard to overstate.

March, '77: Secretary of State Cyrus Vance went to Moscow with the Carter administration's new proposals for the second strategic arms limitation treaty. Vance proposed drastic cuts in the nuclear arsenals, and the Soviets rejected him out of hand.

April 11, '77: former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger met in Washington with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. They talked about the current SALT negotiations.

Late April, '77: the CIA received an intelligence packet from Filatov which contained a microfilm of what was purported to be the cable from Dobrynin to the Politburo on his meeting with Kissinger. It was very damaging to Kissinger; it was also Filatov's last report.

July, '77: the KGB picked up an American Embassy official in Moscow named Martha Peterson. The Soviet press identified her as a CIA agent who was found carrying two poison capsules. Intelligence experts here confirm she was a contact for Filatov, who supposedly had asked for the poison in case the KGB found him out. It already had.

July, '78: Soviet dissident Anatoliy Scharansky was on trial for alleged CIA connections. With attention fixed on that trial, Tass chose to reveal that another Soviet citizen, one Anatoliy Filatov, was also on trial for espionage. The Soviet press later reported that he had been executed.

But that's not the end of the story. Just before this year's Republican convention, sources who evidently wished to embarrass Kissinger leaked some of the contents of the Dobrynin cable, in which, among other things, Kissinger is alleged to have called President Carter and National Security Adviser Brzezinski "crazy." Kissinger, of course, denies it. And that cable is now considered by some experts to be a case of Soviet

disinformation.

Then there was another leak, which alleged that Filatov had been compromised back in January, '77 by a senior White House official who made an inadvertent remark at a cocktail party to an Eastern European diplomat. The White House has strongly denied this as the most vile form of McCarthyism, but apparently responding to that allegation, Senators Wallop and Moynihan last week wrote to the Senate Intelligence Committee to investigate the exposure and death of Filatov, which they called a major intelligence failure.

However, ABC News has learned that at the request of Deputy Attorney General Judge Charles Renfrew the FBI has investigated the allegation that a White House aide may have blown Filatov's cover. Judge Renfrew told us that the FBI found no evidence to support this allegation.

It should be noted that much of the Filatov story comes from Soviet sources. And although American intelligence will confirm some elements of it, U. S. officials are still very reluctant to go into the matter. And so when you bring together the nether world of espionage and a series of politically inspired leaks, what you have is a compelling story which leaves more questions than answers.

Barrie Dunsmore, ABC News, the State Department.

KOPPEL: The unanswered question of whether political motives may have been behind some of the revelations in the Filatov case or in the leaking of other classified information in recent weeks -- that question outrages Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, as he explained to us earlier today.

SENATOR DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN: Well, if that were so, it is despicable and very possibly criminal. And there is suggestions that it is so. And to clear the matter up as much as you can do, Senator Wallop and I, bipartisan, have asked the Intelligence Committee, of which we are members, to hold closed hearings on a number of events.

KOPPEL: Is the Filatov case one of those that you're concerned about?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: If you're referring to the agent we had in place in Moscow....

KOPPEL: Yes.

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: ...yes.

KOPPEL: In a moment, we'll talk live with the journalist

who uncovered many details of the Filatov case and with a former Czechoslovakian intelligence officer.

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KOPPEL: Standing by now in our studios here in Washington is David Martin, author of Wilderness of Mirrors, a book on the KGB and the CIA, and the Newsweek correspondent who first broke many of the details of the Filatov story. And at our Boston affiliate, WCVB, Ladislav Bittman, who, before defecting to the West, was the head of the Disinformation Department of Czechoslovakian Intelligence.

Mr. Martin, I'd like, if I may, to turn first to you and ask you why you think someone -- and I won't insult you by asking you who -- but why was someone so good to you as to reveal the information that you used in your story?

DAVID MARTIN: Well, Kissinger himself has accused the administration of leaking this story on the eve of the Republican convention in an attempt to discredit him for obvious political reasons. And certainly that's not an illogical conclusion to come to.

KOPPEL: Well, you are saying, it seems to me, in a rather subtle way -- and perhaps I need to be hit over the head a little harder -- that your information is, and you are in a position to know, that that was, in fact, the motivation for it.

MARTIN: You know, it's always impossible to weed out and discern what a particular source's motives might be. And the only thing you can do is talk to as many people as possible in the hope that everybody's self-serving motives will cancel themselves out. And in this case, when I started talking to people who knew about this particular spy case, it became clear to me that there was very, very good reason to believe that this cable describing this conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin was not an authentic cable, but was a deliberate piece of disinformation which was fed to the CIA by the KGB. And that's the way I reported it.

So if anyone set out to use me to discredit Kissinger for political purposes, I'm afraid I disappointed them.

KOPPEL: Well, since you have now raised the subject of disinformation, let me turn to Dr. Bittman who is standing by in Boston. Dr. Bittman, there was a time when you had a great deal to do with feeding disinformation to the West.

Would you, first of all, just explain to our audience what the process of disinformation is when it's used in the intelligence business.

DR. LADISLAV BITTMAN: Well, disinformation is one of the major techniques used by Soviet bloc intelligence against the West. Disinformation is false information deliberately leaked to the opponents, to the enemy, which can have political -- it can be of a political nature. It can have a political character, a millitary character, or economic character, depending on the operation.

And I think that in recent years, the importance of this technique has been growing.

KOPPEL: Dr. Bittman, if my recollection serves me, you were in intelligence in Czechoslovakia for, what, about sixteen years?

DR. BITTMAN: Well, since 1954 until 1968, fourteen years.

KOPPEL: You must have developed a good nose during that time. What does your nose tell you about the Filatov case? Do you think -- do you think that he had been turned by the KGB? Do you think he was a double agent? Do you think it was a case of disinformation?

DR. BITTMAN: Well, from what I know from the American press, I think that he was recruited as a genuine agent, and probably after several years the Soviets discovered that he worked for the CIA. And then they arrested him and worked with him for a couple of years, used him as a double agent to feed disinformation to the American intelligence service.

KOPPEL: Mr. Martin, do you accept that interpretation? Do you think that sounds pretty accurate?

MARTIN: I do. I'd add one wrinkle, and that is that after the KGB got on to the CIA agent, they didn't necessarily have to arrest him and tell him they had gotten on to him. They could simply start feeding him false information while all the time he thought he was still serving as a bona fide agent for the CIA.

KOPPEL: You've been covering the intelligence story for a number of years, Mr. Martin. You've become something of a specialist on it. Why -- first of all, let me ask you: do you think that more classified information is being leaked these days than ever before?

MARTIN: Do you think that -- yes, I do. As a matter of fact, just last week I had a conversation with the head of one of the intelligence agencies in Washington. And he said to me, you know, we've come to the point where government officials with access to classified information are becoming more

irresponsible with their handling of that information than the reporters they leak it to.

KOPPEL: And why do you think that is? Do you have a personal assessment?

MARTIN: Well, I think we're becoming throughout the government more relaxed about classified information. And also I think it's inevitable in a political season that that sort of thing happens. I mean we've had the Stealth leak, and a number of cases like that.

KOPPEL: Dr. Bittman, I'd like to leave the last word, if I may, to you, and I would like your assessment of what you think the Soviet bloc -- how they regard what is happening in this country with these leaks. Do you think they accept these leaks at face value?

DR. BITTMAN: You mean whether the Soviets accept these leaks?

KOPPEL: Yes. In other words, do they believe their own good fortune? They're seeing an awful lot of classified material floating around in our press. Do you think that's believed, or do you think that in this convoluted world they think that's disinformation?

DR. BITTMAN: No. Well, they certainly pay a lot of attention to the press. They know they can find valuable information in the American press. But this is not enough. The Soviet intelligence service or East European communist intelligence services rely mainly on information received from agents, from recruited individuals. That is the major source. That is the primary source of information.

KOPPEL: So you would say there are number of American-style Filatovs in this country right now?

DR. BITTMAN: I am absolutely sure about that.

KOPPEL: Thank you very much, Dr. Bittmann, Mr. Martin.

In a moment, a look at the men and women in the trenches in this invisible war, the spies themselves.

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KOPPEL: There has always been a certain romance associated with espionage, but, in reality, the life of a spy is anything but romantic. John Martin reports.

JOHN MARTIN: Much of what we know about spying seems

glamorous and exotic. Mata Hari, the alluring dancer, enticing military secrets from French soldiers for her German spy masters during the First World War.

Spying seems patriotic and bitter-sweet. Nathan Hale, a captain from Connecticut, receiving instructions from General Washington, posing as a schoolteacher behind British lines, observing troops; then, captured and ready for death, proudly proclaiming "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

But much of what we don't know about spying seems sordid. What caused the murder of this man just last week in New York City, a Cuban singled out as a spy by anti-Castro terrorists? Was he? Or the murder of the American CIA station chief in Greece, Richard Welch, shot down in front of his home five years ago. Or the agony of a country over a couple, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the only Americans ever sent to their deaths as spies by a civil jury. Were they guilty?

And what about John Paisley, his body found in Chesapeake Bay two years ago, belted with weights, his CIA connections suggesting murder? But why? Another mystery shrouded in a Cold War that has suspended East and West between war and peace for 35 years now.

In the end, vital as nations find it, spying may not be a matter of glamour or brillance or even pure patriotism, but of necessity; the dirty work of tired men, men like John LeCarre's Lemus, the embittered spy who came in the from the cold.

[Clip from "The Spy Who Came in from the Cold."]

RICHARD BURTON: What the hell do you think spies are? Moral philosophers measuring everything they do against the word of God or Karl Marx? They're not. They're just a bunch of seedy, squalid bastards like me, little men, drunkards, queers, henpecked husbands, civil servants playing cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten little lives. Do you think they sit like monks in a cell balancing right against wrong?

WOMAN: What rules are you playing?

BURTON: There's only one rule -- expediency.

MARTIN: John Martin, ABC News, New York.

KOPPEL: We'll have the latest on Iran in a moment.

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KOPPEL: Day 319 of the crisis in Iran, and the State Department says it will agree to an international inquiry into Iran's grievances against the United States if that will help speed the hostages' release.

Earlier today, Iranian President Bani-Sadr said he had received word the U. S. would accept such an inquiry. Bani-Sadr said that acceptance would, quote, "satisfy Iran's demands concerning American crimes in Iran." End quote.

U. S. officials caution that there still have been no real negotiations with Iran nor does Bani-Sadr speak for all factions.

That's our report for tonight. This is Ted Koppel in Washington. For all of us here at ABC News, good night.

ANNOUNCER: This has been Nightline, a presentation of ABC News.